



## News Release

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### **More than Just Numbers**

#### *Families of Teen Crash Victims Share Stories of Loss*

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Motor vehicle crashes continue to kill more teens ages 15-19 in Utah than any other cause. In 2007, 40 teenagers were killed on Utah roads. Today, many of the victim's families shared their stories to send a message to other teens to drive safely.

"Those killed were more than just a statistic," said Kevin Condra, spokesperson for the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) Violence and Injury Prevention Program. "These teens could have been anyone's child, brother, sister or friend. They represent dreams lost and lives shattered when such tragic, and most often preventable, events occur."

A collection of 15 stories from families who lost a son or daughter were put into a booklet that will be used by the UDOH and other agencies involved in the Utah Teen Traffic Safety Task Force. It is the parents' hope that their pain-filled stories will help all drivers realize the impact their driving decisions have on others. They also shared their stories at a news conference held today in Salt Lake City.

Kristie, the parent of a happy-go-lucky 18-year-old told how her son, Kyle was involved in a fatal car crash. It was 11:30 p.m. on December 22, 2007 when Kristie and her husband told their children goodnight and "I love you." Unknown to Kristie, Kyle had decided to take the car for a quick ride. Less than a half-hour later, he was dead. "Kyle didn't have much driving experience. He was speeding when he hit a patch of black ice on the road and lost control of the car," said Kristie. The vehicle slammed into a telephone pole, killing him on impact. He was less than a mile from home.

"Parents and teens need to know there is nothing more important than safety," said Kristie.

"You just never know what will happen."

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Thirty-four of the 40 teens killed in 2007 were either a driver or passenger in a car. Four died in motorcycle crashes and two were pedestrians. And it wasn't just younger, less-experienced drivers who were killed. Teens ages 18-19 (62%) were involved in the most fatal crashes in 2007 when compared to younger teens.

“Safe driving doesn't stop when you get your driver's license,” said Condra. “Talk to your teens about wearing their seat belts, following traffic laws, and using good judgment when they are in and around motor vehicles.”

Sixty percent of the deaths involved a single car and 61% had two or more passengers in the vehicle. Thirty-eight percent of the crashes occurred between 12:00 midnight and 4:00 a.m. and approximately 55% of the fatalities occurred during the weekend hours of 5:00 p.m. Friday to 5:00 a.m. Monday. More than half (54%) of the victims were not wearing a seat belt.

These tragedies could have been prevented by making safe driving decisions. UDOH urges parents of teenage drivers to:

- Establish safe driving rules with consequences. Rules should address seat belt use, distracted driving, speeding, cell phone and/text messaging use, and practicing good judgment. Remind older teens to avoid these hazards and to drive safely.
- Always wear a seat belt and be firm in making passengers do the same.
- Always wear a helmet when driving or riding on a motorcycle.
- Limit the number of passengers allowed in a vehicle with a teenage driver.
- Avoid driving between 12:00 midnight and 5:00 a.m.

For more teen driving safety tips or to download a copy of the families' stories in the “*Zero Fatalities: Fifteen reasons why Zero is the only acceptable number*” booklet, visit [www.health.utah.gov/vipp](http://www.health.utah.gov/vipp).

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